

# THE BATTLE FOR THE CHILDREN

**Nobody won-but the children lost**

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**At stake: control of the Warrendale Centre For Emotionally Disturbed Children. The bitter contestants: Warrendale's unorthodox director vs. the Ontario government. Here's how they fought their rancorous battle--at an incalculable cost to those it was supposed to save.**



EDITH IS A 13-year-old Toronto girl who sometimes carves up her arms with a darning needle. Sometimes she tumbles into a depression so deep that faces and voices from the real world are unseen, unheard. Sometimes she screams until sedatives wipe the twisted images from her brain. Three years ago her younger sister died in circumstances that the Metropolitan Toronto Children's Aid Society describes only as too horrifying to relate. Her mother was committed for life to an Ontario mental hospital. Edith was placed in a foster home and ran away twice; once she was charged with vagrancy. Now she is in an observation home run by the Children's Aid Society, waiting for treatment. She told a caseworker, "I need to be shut up where I can get treatment. I think there is something wrong in my head."

Edith needs treatment. Edith wants treatment. But Edith can't get treatment. There are at least half a million children like her in Canada. There are at least 100,000 like her in Ontario who desperately need professional help. Last summer fewer than 700 were getting it. There were 22 classes for about 170 emotionally disturbed children in the province, and 26 classes for about 200 neurologically impaired (a term that encompasses numerous disorders involving brain defects). There were treatment and accommodation facilities for only about 300 emotionally disturbed children in all of Ontario.

It was against this lamentable background that the battle of Warrendale began in Toronto last summer and raged into the fall. Warrendale: the disgusting, sickening spectacle of factions of politicians, professional men and social workers disrupting one existing treatment centre with less rationality than might be expected of the children in their care, permitting the children to be exploited on national television, bickering and squabbling among themselves in voices louder and shriller than the cries of children in the dark. Nobody won the battle of Warrendale, but the losers are easy to identify. They are the 57 children who were there and the thousands who, like Edith, were not.

The Warrendale Centre For Emotionally Disturbed Children comprises six residences and a school on a short dead-end street in Etobicoke, a suburb of Toronto. The residences resemble — and are designed to resemble — suburban homes, for a warm homelike atmosphere is the heart of the Warrendale method. In mid-summer in this unlikely setting began a confused chronology of events, charges and counter-charges that reached a climax on the night of September 8 when 20 disturbed children ran away from what one of them later described as a “panic situation.”

**Was it enough just to give them love? Yes, replied the radical. No, replied the orthodox.**



The situation was none of their doing. It is doubtful even if the battle of Warrendale was fought on their behalf. It was a bitter, essentially personal clash between John L. Brown, a radical psychiatric social worker and an NDP member who was fired after 13 years as Warrendale's executive director, and the Conservative Ontario government at Queen's Park with its understaffed corps of orthodox professionals in the child-care field.

Under Brown, Warrendale was a private agency depending on Department of Welfare subsidies to pay the bulk of its expenses of \$26.30 per child-day. Brown, fiercely independent, and acid-tongued critic of Queen's Park, wanted government subsidies without government influence. The Welfare Department, its Conservative attitudes indirectly reflected in Warrendale's socially eminent board of directors, could no more approve of

his increasing independence than of his methods or his politics. Brown was forever rushing in where Welfare professionals and board members feared to tread. Says Robert McNair, the new president of the Warrendale board, “He was always forceful, a spellbinder, and demanding expansion, expansion when we just hadn’t any idea where staff could come from.” Crossed by the board, Brown would resign in a huff — and the board would talk him out of it. “It might be said that we accepted too much too long,” says McNair.

### **"It's a program to undermine confidence in me"-John Brown**



Brown’s methods were undeniably effective: two theses by Warrendale staff workers cited 85 to 90 percent rehabilitation (although government critics claim that the studies weren’t carried out with sufficient controls and wouldn’t be accepted by any scientific authority). What had become known as the Warrendale Method (and was described in the February 19, 1966, issue of Maclean’s) involved a large staff — ideally as many staff members as patients — and an emphasis on demonstrable love and affection instead of on charts and graphs. (The Warrendale staff was a little too demonstrative, according to some observers. Brown has been plagued by rumors involving social workers and teenage girl patients.)

While Brown sniped at departmental bureaucrats and snipped at red tape, the government group expressed a lack of confidence in his treatment philosophy. His give-’em-love theory was seen as a crude simplification by government psychiatrists concerned with accurate diagnoses and the careful selection of treatment programs. Dr. J. Donald Atcheson, superintendent of the government-operated Thistletown Hospital for emotionally disturbed children, and the man who succeeded Brown at Warrendale, was one of these.

“To say that if a child is hungry it doesn’t matter what for is an illogical statement,” says Dr. Atcheson. “To say that if a child is disturbed it doesn’t matter what for is equally illogical. We need to know what food the child needs. We need to diagnose his disturbance.”

Government experts watched teenagers sucking at baby bottles and being cuddled by Brown's staff — part of Warrendale's contentious "retrogression method" — and winced, not necessarily because they objected to the treatment, but because it was imposed without selectivity. They winced even harder at photographs now in Department of Health files showing giggling patients giving baby bottles to the staff. Brown's Warrendale had about it an unpleasant aura of the bizarre.

Still another issue was Brown Camps Ltd., a far-flung group of summer facilities for emotionally disturbed children which Brown had launched over the dead bodies of the board. "We considered this a direct conflict of interests and we flatly told Brown to discontinue this activity," says McNair. But Brown Camps Ltd. is now an all-year, private-treatment empire housing many of the children displaced from Warrendale, and employing most of its staff.

Probably Brown lasted as long as he did at Warrendale because he was what the government group so palpably was not. He was an activist. The Department of Welfare needed him badly. Behind him the Welfare experts could glimpse all the Ediths of Ontario, disorganized, inarticulate and alone. As it was, resentments — personal, political and professional — were left to simmer for years. Perhaps that is why the abridged chronology that follows of the battle of Warrendale seems to be as good a demonstration of irrational behavior as the case history of any disturbed child, and a demonstration of inadvertent cruelty, and a demonstration that man, the father, in trying to do the best by his children, sometimes does the worst.

**AUGUST 11 :** In a press conference, Brown charged that the Warrendale board had fired him, effective September 1, because he had been nominated NDP candidate for a new provincial riding in Toronto. Had he been running as a Conservative, he said, he probably would have got a raise instead. He accused the Department of Welfare of running a "scare campaign" against him personally and of hinting that it "had something" on him. He described Welfare Minister Louis Cecile as "a nothing" and likened Deputy Minister James Band to the storybook character Eoxy-Loxy who devoured a trusting chicken.

### **"We need to diagnose the child's disturbance" Dr. J. Donald Atcheson**

"You can look at Jim Band's mouth and see Warrendale's tail feathers hanging out," Brown said.

**AUGUST 24:** Robert Henry, Warrendale's assistant director and the man who had been named as Brown's successor, resigned. Henry said that he was not in a position to maintain a treatment program.

**AUGUST 25:** The entire staff of Warrendale, 40 social workers and teachers, announced their resignations. Members said that the board was interfering in Warrendale policy. Welfare Minister Cecile said he suspected the whole thing was an NDP plot engineered by Brown. Brown said a board clique led by President John Pollock seemed determined to destroy the Warrendale treatment method.

**AUGUST 27:** Samuel Berman, a senior official of the Child Welfare League of America called in by the Warrendale board to mediate the dispute, persuaded the staff to defer their resignations until September 15.

**SEPTEMBER 1 :** Carlo Tela, assistant to Robert Henry, and Walter Gunn, director of residential treatment, resigned. Gunn said the board's action in firing Brown and disrupting treatment at Warrendale was the most destructive action in the history of welfare.

**SEPTEMBER 3:** The Warrendale staff announced that it would resign en masse September 8 despite assurances given to mediator Samuel Berman. Parents and welfare agencies with children at Warrendale were asked to remove them before September 9. Members of the staff reported that children were beguiling them not to be sent away. Toronto children's agencies prepared to staff the centre on a temporary basis if the walkout occurred.

**SEPTEMBER 8:** In a sudden move, the Province of Ontario took over the operation of Warrendale. Health Minister Matthew Dymond said the Warrendale board had asked the Welfare Department to assume responsibility, but that Welfare Minister Cecile said his department didn't have the facilities. The Health Department would, said Dr. Dymond, install a special team of hand-picked senior experts in child care headed by Dr. Acheson of Thistletown Hospital.

**“They let us have it, screaming... calling us liars, idiots”**

At this point we'll pause to consider a report written by a Children's Aid Society caseworker who participated in the takeover. An impartial child psychiatrist who read this almost incredible document remarked. “The departing staff acted in the way you'd

expect the parents of emotionally disturbed children to act in cases where the parents were responsible for the disturbance ”

The report has not previously been published. Here it is:

We met the head of one of the houses outside the administration building and told him we were going to be taking it over and asked him if he could brief us on some of his children. He said he could not possibly do it and it would take us at least six months before we understood anything about them at all.

We asked him if he could give us any idea of their daily routine and he replied we were supposed to be mature, responsible, trained staff and we should be able to make these decisions ourselves without his advice. This type of conversation continued for some time and we decided to go over to the house and he would introduce us to the children.

We all gathered in the living room of house number one: new staff, old staff and children, and the old staff proceeded to interrogate us. They asked our names, position and experience, and wanted to know why we were there. We explained we were there out of necessity because someone had to look after the children.

At this, the old staff let us have it, screaming and shouting and swearing, calling us liars and idiots, unable to make our own decisions, saying that if we really did not think we were doing the right thing then we shouldn't be there, no matter what our superiors said.

They asked us about Thistlethorn and our treatment therapy there and everything we said they said were lies. For about an hour and a half they sat screaming at us, accusing us of lying about everything. Finally, we got Dr. Atcheson to come over and ask them to leave. They gave us no information about the children except their ages and names, and left, promising the children they would come back and get them. That night several old staff returned, saying they had forgotten articles and clothing, wallets, etc., and coming in to speak to the children. They took one child with them, an 18-year-old boy. One girl ran away during the night or was taken. I do not know which.

There have been numerous phone calls between old staff and children since we arrived. Two children ran away on Sunday night (September 11 ) and called a former worker to pick them up and the worker did not notify us, but notified the agencies from which the children came. The children were subsequently returned by Dr. Atcheson.

When we asked the head of the house if any of the children were on medication, he replied that they did not “dope” their children and we did not find out until two days later that two of them were on medication three times daily.

**SEPTEMBER 9:** Police investigated the disappearance of 20 children from Warrendale amid charges they had been abducted. Officials claimed that 12 children were picked up by a station wagon driven by a former member of the staff. Other children slipped away during the night. About 10 children hitchhiked 26 miles from Warrendale to the Oak Ridges treatment centre, which had been turned over to Brown at the time of his dismissal. One 12-year-old boy walked. David Solberg, supervisor of the Oak Ridges centre, said he could hardly believe that the boy had made it safely. “He has severe suicidal tendencies.”

**SEPTEMBER 10:** Donald Hurley, president of the Ontario Association for Emotionally Disturbed Children, blamed Brown, the Warrendale board and the Ontario government equally for causing “incalculable damage” to the children. Brown said the takeover of Warrendale was illegal. Dr. K. C. Charron, Deputy Health Minister, blamed former staff members for impeding the smooth transfer of authority.

**SEPTEMBER 12:** At 4 a.m. four government officials and social workers, backed up by two uniformed policemen, raided the Toronto apartment of a former Warrendale caseworker, Vicki Hollenberg, to pick up and return two children who had run away from Warrendale. Elizabeth Graham, Director of Child Welfare for Ontario, led the raiding party. The runaways were two girls, 12 and 14 years old. Miss Hollenberg said she had received permission through two

Children’s Aid Societies to keep the children in her apartment overnight. Miss Graham said she had authority under the Child Welfare Act to inspect the apartment and remove the children.

“They just barged in.” Miss Hollenberg said later. “The girls started screaming that they wouldn’t go back to Warrendale.”

Miss Graham denied there was any shouting or screaming. “One of the girls did swear a couple of times,” she said.

Miss Hollenberg said she was contemplating legal action against Miss Graham. Miss Graham said her department was considering charges against Miss Hollenberg and others under a section of the Child Welfare Act which makes it illegal to induce children

away from child-care institutions. “I saw the two girls at Warrendale before the incident,” said Miss Graham, “and they were happy as clams.”

**SEPTEMBER 13:** Warrendale’s board of directors rushed into the fray, breaking a long silence. The new board president, Robert McNair, charged that Brown had given large pay increases without board permission to selected staff members including himself and his wife, who is a psychiatric caseworker: had created a conflict of interest by setting up his own summer-camp business; had forced staff to take psychotherapy as a condition of employment, charging them \$10 an hour for the sessions; and had failed to keep an agreement to try to persuade the staff to remain after his dismissal. McNair said Brown had been given the contents of the Oak Ridges centre and three motor vehicles for one dollar to allow him to continue his work. “He accepted with alacrity all we would give him. Then to the best of our knowledge he made no attempt to live up to his agreement, and the staff resigned with him. He was a Pied Piper being followed by his mesmerized staff ...”

**OCTOBER 26:** Health Minister Dymond authorized an inquiry of Warrendale and Brown Camps Ltd. to be conducted by Dr. J. C. Rathbun, head of the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Western Ontario, and a committee of three experts in the field. Sessions would be closed “in the interests of the children involved.” informed sources „connected with the government — those people who will tell you anything providing you don't reveal their names — said the government had a strong case against Brown's methods and conduct, and that Brown Camps Ltd. could be closed down.

Brown himself professed scorn for the charges and the gossip — especially for the gossip that had spread like an evil weed over Warrendale since his dismissal. “Top psychiatric people at the Department of Health are gossiping like old ladies over a fence,” he said. “There is a lot of slanderous talk in the profession to the effect that Dr. Dymond has photos showing sexual intimacies at Warrendale. He has a moral responsibility to bring these pictures out. not at a closed inquiry, but now. He ought to put up or shut up.”

But Dr. Dymond wasn’t talking in October; neither was Dr. Atchcson. the quiet psychiatrist who took over Warrendale when the Health Department moved in. “Someday I'll vomit up the way I feel about it.” he said. He said that the children still at Warrendale were getting along “as well as can be expected.” Three of six houses were in operation. “It may take us a year to get the staff together to operate the other three.”

**“The children weren’t hurt by any of this publicity”**

Earlier, Dr. Atcheson said that when the provincial authorities moved in they found the children extremely frightened and upset. “They thought, and told me specifically, that I was a person who would break their arms.” He said that, under Brown, interaction between staff and children seemed “emotionally too intense,” leading to a double-dependence situation in which the children developed an unwarranted dependence on staff members who, in turn, seized on this dependence to substantiate their success. He said that psychoanalysis had been used at Warrendale by wholly unqualified persons: “The only person who can render skilled psychiatric treatment is a skilled psychiatrist.” He said it was unforgivable of Brown to let TV and newspaper reporters interview Warrendale runaways and disseminate their frantic charges.

This last remark brings a blast from Brown. “The children weren't hurt by any of this publicity. Don't give me that stuff about the Department of Health protecting the children — go to Smiths Falls, go to Orillia; you'll see ‘protection.’ ” (Here, Brown is accusing government-run institutions of maltreatment.) “We don't operate in an atmosphere of secrecy the way they do — I hear that you can't even get into Warrendale now.” (The Department of Health has closed the centre and its patients to reporters.) “This is the talk of a very small man. It's a way of trying to damage my work and reputation. It's part of a program designed to undermine confidence in me and in my methods. I would never have believed that Dymond and Atcheson would stoop to that.”

A newsletter Brown sent in September to parents and social agencies contained inflammatory statements by his staff and patients. One teenage girl contributed the following: “. . . I'm worried about the kids who are still there. They're scared to cry or get mad because they know if they express any emotions they'll be given needles.” The newsletter fell into the hands of J. V. Belknap, Deputy Superintendent of Child Welfare for British Columbia. Brown had been treating 13 children from BC. Belknap wrote to Brown, in part: “I am shocked in the extreme that you would resort to such a blatant device, using the children's confusion, anxiety and fear to propagandize for the purpose of aggrandizing your limited company.” Belknap returned 11 children to BC, albeit to a Brown Camps affiliate.

The sniping continues. A government source says a box of sleeping pills was found in a bedside drawer at Warrendale after the takeover. Brown says he has heard that there is a “fantastic amount” of breakage in the centre. “That means the staff still isn't in control.” A government source says Brown is a liar. Brown says.

"They're going on the assumption that everything they do is lily-white. It's a smokescreen to cover their lies. It will be a long time before the Department of Health can live down their action on any grounds."

In an effort to justify his own action in the battle of Warrendale, Brown decided in October to pay for an investigation of his treatment methods, administration, staff-child relations, staff therapy and the rationale of his treatment centre. The report, conducted by Dan Q. R. Mulock Houwer, Dutch Secretary-General of the International Union of Child Welfare, would take a month to prepare and would be made public in December, Brown said, "regardless of its contents." The trouble is, Mulock Houwer is hardly an impartial observer, and the contents of his report are not likely to embarrass Brown. In 1961, Mulock Houwer described Warrendale in the newsletter of the International Union for Child Welfare as a "pearl of great value." He described Brown as a pioneer who had not been sufficiently appreciated, and said that if Warrendale should "not be able to go on as it is at present, Toronto will lose one of the most advanced realizations existing in the field of the therapeutical approach ..."

Brown defends his paid-therapy sessions. "The money screens out the ones who aren't serious and it motivates the others to use the material." He defends the irrational behavior of his staff during the takeover. "You can't make an ethic out of the conduct of a group of people who have had their authority pulled out from under them. The ethic lies where the power lies." He admits that some of his staff have emotional problems, but he says it isn't true that his staff needs the children as much as the children need his staff. He says he doesn't know of any of his staff having criminal records — another government allegation. "If I took a group of psychiatrists, they'd show the same kind of variation," says John Brown. "It's a fallacy to assume that one group of people is healthy and one group sick."

Well, it is easy to go along with that, for the battle of Warrendale was irrational from beginning to end. Writing in the Toronto Star, Dr. John Rich, a consulting psychiatrist who was the first director of Thistletown Hospital, saw the battle in terms of mounting pressures and clouding judgments. "It has been tragic to see," Dr. Rich wrote, "how the Warrendale group's compassion turned into sentimentality, and the government group's firmness led to tough-guy behavior and rigidity," In their hysterical determination to prove themselves right, both sides proved themselves wrong. In ignoring or forgetting their responsibilities, they swept the children into a turmoil that was far worse for them than no treatment at all.

Carol is a 15-year-old from London, Ont., who ran away from Warrendale to Brown's Oak Ridges centre, where she was permitted to stay. A month later Brown moved her to a new centre in Muskoka. In late October she was back at Oak Ridges for an examination by Dr. Martin Fischer, a psychiatrist who is a consultant to Brown Camps Ltd. Carol was suffering from terrible nightmares. She would wake up screaming. In her nightmares she would hear the voice of a child, a voice that accused her of causing the disruption of Warrendale. Nobody could convince Carol that her nightmares were all tied up with guilt feelings from her past, and that she, of all people, had nothing to do with it. ★